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BIBLICAL MEDICINE AND HYGIENE.

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“Honour a physician according to thy need of him with the honour due unto him: for verily the Lord hath created him. For from me Most High cometh healing: and from the King shall he receive a gift. The skill of a physician shall lift up his head: and in the sight of great men he shall be admired. The Lord created medicines out of the earth: and a prudent man will have no disgust at them.” So wrote Jesus the son of Sirach, in Ecclesiasticus. But amongst theologians many texts, such as “They who minister about holy things should live of the gospel” are more popular. In fact, these verses have received scant notice. One writer—a humorist, no doubt—correlates them, as is the theological custom, with certain New Testament verses, and concludes that these are the physicians of whom the woman with the issue of blood had suffered many things, and on whom she had spent all her living. (Yet the proverbs of the ancient Hebrews refer to the physician in equally favourable terms: “A wise man will not live in a town where there is no physician”) “They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.”

It has repeatedly been observed that the Hebrew race, in spite of centuries of wandering, is remarkably healthy. To-day they enjoy a relative immunity from tuberculosis (Osler), and when they do not lapse from the Levitical code, frequently escape zymotic disease during an epidemic. This cannot all be attributed to the original virility of the clan because no Jewish blood is pure to-day. An explanation can be found, however, when we consider that which Israel Zangwill has termed the “pot and pan part of their religion” was, in reality, a religion of cleanliness and implied the ability on the part of the priests

of diagnosing many diseases and embodied rudiments of preventive medicine. //

The connexion between religion and medicine was not an unmitigated blessing. Accurate medical knowledge now obtained by post-mortem examination was impossible on account of the ceremonial uncleanness which followed contact with a corpse. Further, the annual gathering of the people in high places aided in the dissemination of disease and was productive of much vice and immorality.

Two theories of the etiology of disease in general held sway: (1) The Demonic; that some diseases were due to the possession of the patient by some demon, or if the illness was very severe, by a legion, at least, of evil spirits; (2) The Punitive; that diseases were meted out as punishment by Yahweh for sins either of the patient or of some of his ancestors. Hence, when any one took sick, the head of the family carried an offering to some temple and asked as to the fate of the patient. If the answer came back that he must die, then, as with the Greeks, it was considered useless "to strive against the Gods." A favourable answer and promise of recovery also freed the friends from anxiety and made treatment unnecessary. "If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God and wilt do that which is right in His sight and wilt give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee which I have brought upon the Egyptians, for I am the Lord that healeth thee."—*Exod.*, XV, 26.

While tracing their diseases, as they did their origin and theology back to the "First Cause," the Jews recognized secondary causes as operative in the production of disease. When the Philistines were stricken with what was probably the bubonic plague they evidently recognized as we do to-day that the disease was carried from one section of the country to another by rats and mice, for they endeavoured to propitiate Yahweh by offering five golden images of the most noticeable result of the disease and five golden rats—images of the probable disseminators of the plague. Again, when the wanderers in the wilderness wearied of manna and craved for a more varied menu, an epidemic broke out in the camp, which the people attributed to the quail which they had just eaten.—*Num.*, XI, 33. To-day we know that the quail probably carried infection to the Hebrew camp from some other band of wanderers, it may have been some Bedouin caravan.

From the accuracy of the Biblical descriptions we know that many diseases were recognized by the ancient Hebrews. Saul, "naturally a shy, self-conscious man, easily exalted into ecstasy and tyrannical self-

satisfaction, possessed of an impulse to homicide, turning against his own son, and finally becoming despondent and meeting with death by suicide" (Hasting's Bible Dictionary), was a victim of recurrent paroxysmal mania. Nebuchadnezzar, like the daughters of Proetus, suffered for seven years from monomania, believing that he was a beast. Nabal, after a hearty supper and a somewhat riotous night was stricken with appoplexy and died ten days later; or, as the Hebrew states it, "his heart died within him and he became as a stone, and it came to pass about ten days later that the Lord smote Nabal that he died."—*I Sam.*, XXV., 37, 38.

Ahijah's eyes were "fixed by age," a poetic description of senile cataract. Epileptics were common in Bible days as now, but nowhere do we find a more accurate account of an epileptic seizure than in *Luke IX*, 39: "And lo, a spirit taketh him and he suddenly crieth out; and it teareth him that he foameth again, and bruising him hardly departed from him." Again, a priest who had contracted spinal caries could not minister in the sanctuary, and the same prohibition was applied to a man with a flat nose—doubtless a sign of the same disease, as Hogarth meant it to be in so many of his pictures.

Palsy, of which we read so frequently, was equivalent to the word paralysis of to-day, a symptom of many diseases of the nervous system. The centurion's servant probably had meningitis, *Matt.*, VIII, 6; while the man with the withered hand, *Matt.*, XII, 9-13, could probably date his disability from an attack of infantile paralysis.

Palestine was naturally a healthy land. A country of hills and valleys, with rapid streams not easily polluted, and having no harbours, could have few imported epidemics. Yet we read of diseases which we must attribute to the climate. One of the promises held out to the godly by the Psalmist was, "the sun shall not smite thee by day nor the moon by night," *Psalms*, CXXI, 6; an immunity which would be valued by a community whose history recorded deaths by sunstroke, such as that of the Shunammite's son, *2 Kings IV*, 19, and of Menasses, *Judith VIII*, 3. In *Deut. XXVIII*, 22, we have reference to fevers, probably of malarial origin, and to "consumption," which some have identified as modern pulmonary phthisis; while the Jewish proverb, that it is easier to rear a forest of olive trees than one child, would indicate that infantile diseases were exceptionally severe.

Surgical cases then, as now, were considered more dangerous and, consequently, brought greater fame to the successful physician. The woman bound by the spirit of her infirmity, *Luke XIII*. 11-17, was a case of senile kyphosis; while Lazarus, *Luke XVI*, 20, was the typical

beggar outcast from society, who can be seen at any of our city dispensaries suffering from varicose ulceration. That the priests possessed some accurate surgical knowledge cannot be disputed, for the rite of circumcision was delayed if the child was jaundiced—a fact that would indicate that they appreciated the danger of hæmorrhage in such conditions. Few cases of accident are described in the Bible, but that which happened to Abimelech is described at sufficient length to give us ground for diagnosing fracture of the skull, the retention of consciousness showing the absence of compression.

The reproach of Van Helmont, that "a bloody Moloch presides in the chairs of medicine" could not be brought against the Hebrew physicians as the sacredness of blood prohibited bleeding. In Proverbs XXX, 15, we have reference to the use of leeches.

Their materia medica consisted of balm of Gilead, myrrh, cinnamon, cassia, aloes, calamus, spikenard, camphor, and mandrake. Folk-lore medicine, as amongst primitive people attributed healing virtues to saliva, and the first aid to the injured rendered by the good Samaritan when he poured oil and wine into the sufferer's wounds was certainly surgically orthodox. They were ignorant, however, of dietary laws, and we cannot but think that Hezekiah was in greater safety when Isaiah prescribed a fig poultice than his kinsman who enjoyed a diet of fig pudding.

Osler, in his "pessimistic therapeutic nihilism," as some of his truthful statements about medicine have been termed by the American writers, has stated that much of the humbuggery of the profession still lingers about mineral waters. But if, as theologians tell us, "never yet has any particular doctrine or mode stating truth held its own for any length of time in human history unless there was some genuine truth beneath it," then we must still count mineral waters of some therapeutic value, since the Hebrews believed in their efficiency even as the Gentiles of to-day. The saline waters of the Jordan, the miraculous healing power of the pool of Siloam, and waters of Bethesda were well known to all devout Jews. And to-day their descendants still bathe in the pool of Bethesda for rheumatism and other disorders. They still believe that the waters are more efficacious when they are "troubled," that is, when the natural syphon under the cave overflows.

One factor which probably contributed in no small degree to the health of the Jewish race was their care in providing good water supplies, that of Jerusalem being particularly complete. The city was supplied by five conduits. One, supposed to have been constructed by Solomon, was thirteen and a half miles long, two feet deep, and one

and a half feet wide, and conveyed water from Solomon's pool to the temple. Another conduit connected this with a reservoir twenty-eight miles away. This latter passed through two tunnels, one four miles and the other seventeen hundred feet in length, while between the two was a reservoir which served as a sedimentation tank. The water was distributed in Jerusalem by leaden pipes to fountains, cisterns, and pools open to the public. We speak of the Jews as a primitive people, and yet contrast this water supply with that of many of our large cities—drawn from rivers of commerce, within a short distance of polluted harbours, conducted to the city and stored in uncovered reservoirs, open to infection, to be distributed to a typhoid-stricken public without filtration or even sedimentation.

→ Of sanitation as we understand the term to-day the Jews knew little. The hungry dogs of the city acted as scavengers, and the sewage disposal was of the crudest character. But even as their primitive views of Yahweh as the national God evolved into the "one God, one law, one element," of to-day, even so were their ceremonial ordinances concerning leprosy the beginning of modern preventive medicine. Suspected lepers notified the priest: they were isolated for twenty-one days, and examined by the priest at weekly intervals. To-day we know that the Jews confounded many skin-diseases, such as vitiligo, with leprosy, but yet we see here the origin of our system of notification and quarantine of infectious diseases.

→ As regards food the Jews were very particular, for was it not written in the law what a man should, and should not, eat? Animals of the herbivorous and ruminant groups were allowed, but no beasts of prey: nor could the fat or blood of any animal be used. In butchering there was, as there is at present, rigid inspection by one of the rabbis, who had definite rules for the detection of diseased meat. "Seven days shalt there be no leaven found in your houses," *Exod.* XII, 19, provided for a very necessary renewal of food supplies.

Amongst a people whose religious nature was so dominant such sanitary regulations could not but markedly effect the vitality of the race. For whether we regard them as the ear-marks of a people chosen by God or consider them only in the light of their modern practical and hygienic value, the old promise is still true: "If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in His sight, and wilt give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of those diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians. For I am the Lord that healeth thee.—*Exod.* XV, 26." ←